

Martin Young

*FOLKSINGERENGLISHROOTS
& CALLER FOR BARN DANCES & CEILIDHS*

FESTIVAL WORKSHOPS **FOR ASPIRING CEILIDH, BARN OR BUSH DANCE CALLERS** **Absolute Beginners only** **1½ - 2 hours**

I have conducted workshops, working with a band or even a single musician to illustrate some of the issues and pitfalls, based on my experience of calling for dances over the last 25 years. Here is a brief programme of some of the main points.

1 How to get started

A. HAVE YOU ACTUALLY BEEN TO A CEILIDH/BARN/BUSH DANCE...AND DANCED?

DANCE THE DANCE. GO TO AS MANY DANCES AS YOU CAN, COLLECTING THEM, TAKE A NOTE PAD AND WRITE THEM DOWN, INCLUDING THE TUNES OR AT LEAST THE TYPE OF TUNE, E.G. USE TUNES THAT WORK FOR THE DANCES I.E. POLKAS, JIGS, SLIP-JIGS, HORNPIPES, SCHOTTISCHES – 32, 48 OR 64 BARS.

TRANSFER DANCES TO INDEX CARDS WORK OUT THE WAY YOU WILL EXPLAIN THESE DANCES. WORK TO A SCRIPT BUT BE PREPARED TO IMPROVISE. DEMONSTRATE IF NECESSARY.

2 Forming a working relationship with a band you have never met

i.e. Speak to the leader before the day of the gig. Ask questions such as, "Do I need to bring my own microphone?"

What is the band's repertoire? Do they have the tunes that you want?

3 When you get to the gig

A. FIND OUT WHO IS PAYING YOU AND MAKE VERY GOOD FRIENDS WITH THEM!

B. Find out what the band expects of you and let them know what you expect of them. i.e. How will you begin and end dances? Will they play dancers on to the floor? Make sure the band is ready to play when you have finished the walk through.

C. START THE EVENING WITH ONE OR TWO SIMPLE DANCES.

GET THE MEASURE OF THE DANCERS AND DON'T TRY ANYTHING TOO DIFFICULT TO BEGIN WITH.

4 DON'T PANIC!!!

A. IF NOBODY WANTS TO DANCE IT'S NOT YOUR FAULT

You might find that no-one responds to your invitation to take the floor. They've paid their money and they knew what they were in for. If not, they still paid to come and if they don't want to get up no begging or pleading will make them. Quite the reverse in fact. Let it go and get the band to play a set of tunes and keep playing until they are ready to dance. Look around as the band play and when you see the audience tapping their feet, that's a good sign. In some cases, depending on the event, a wedding perhaps, the organiser might approach you and say, "We're ready to start now". That's a good clue, too.

B. The caller can make or break an evening

YOU CAN GET AWAY WITH A BAND WHICH IS STILL LEARNING BUT AUDIENCES ARE NOT SO PATIENT WITH CALLERS.

YOU ARE NOT GOING TO BE PERFECT FROM DAY ONE. MINIMISE MISTAKES AND PROBLEMS WITH GOOD **PREPARATION.**